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THE CLASSICAL WEEKLY

Entered as second-class matter November 18, 1907, at the Post Office, New York, N. Y., under the Act of Congress of March 1, 1879

VOL. X

NEW YORK, MAY 7, 1917

No. 26

THE TAURIC IPHIGENIA AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Editorial

"To have seen a Grecian play is a great remembrance", wrote DeQuincey in 1845, after the performance at Edinburgh of the *Antigone* in English with Mendelssohn's new music, and, though in recent times, since the *Oedipus Tyrannus* was so superbly presented at Harvard in 1881, productions of Greek plays in English have become common and even popular, it is still a rare and memorable experience to hear the master pieces of the Athenian drama creditably rendered in the original Greek. "It was cheap at the price of a journey to Siberia", DeQuincey added; and one who had traveled to Harvard in 1906 to see the masterpiece of Aeschylus performed, and to Dartmouth in 1910 to witness that of Sophocles was well repaid for a trip to Ann Arbor to see the favorite play of Euripides presented on March 29, 1917, by The Classical Club of the University of Michigan. It was a high service to the cause of the Classics that these young people rendered by giving this performance when the Michigan Schoolmaster's Club was holding its fifty-second meeting—an object-lesson as to the enduring beauty, inspiration, and human appeal of Greek literature, of more value than all the discussions, papers, addresses, and apologetics generally in which such meetings abound. A unique feature of the occasion was the presence of a large number of native Greeks from Detroit, Ypsilanti, and elsewhere, who were addressed in their own tongue by Professor C. L. Meader and gave a most enthusiastic response.

The play was cut down by somewhat over one-third, the chief cuts being made in the long Second Episode, with its great recognition scene, which in action entirely justified the admiration of Aristotle. The scenery was beautiful, an impressive Doric temple in a charming woodland setting; one would have welcomed a glimpse of the sea in the background, so large is the part it plays by suggestion in this romantic drama. The acting was done with great spirit and naturalness and feeling, and much credit is due to the young actors, who enjoyed the advantage of having women take the feminine rôles (as they did in the Stanford University production of the *Antigone* in 1902)—an advantage denied to the University of Pennsylvania in its performance of this play in 1903. The chief aim of the actors was to make the

drama interesting even to those—the great majority of their audience—who knew no Greek, and there can be no doubt as to the correctness and the success of their aim, even if it involved the sacrifice of some important things. A clearer and slower declamation of the lines might have bored most of the hearers (as was the case with the Dartmouth *Oedipus*); the Hellenist could follow the words at least as well as he could in an opera (and, after all, Greek tragedy was very much of an opera), while the barbarian had all the enjoyment of a beautiful moving picture, full of life and color, with the potent added charm of the strangely beautiful music.

The music indeed was the crowning distinction of this performance, for which it was especially composed. Professor Stanley had already shown his genius for adapting the Greek modes to modern ears in his exquisite settings of the lyrics in Percy Mackaye's *Sappho and Phaon* and in Euripides's *Alceste*, which was played in English some years ago at the University of Michigan. In the *Iphigenia in Tauris* the Greek rhythms were closely followed (the *Kommos* with its difficult dochmiacs was wisely omitted), as they were in Mendelssohn's music, but here for the first time the Dorian, Phrygian, and Aeolian modes were freely employed by a master hand and modern harmonies were avoided. The music was rendered by a small choir of skilled singers behind the scenes, to the accompaniment of two flutes, two clarinets, a harp, and a small piano, sufficiently suggestive of ancient instruments, and, as it interpreted the varied feelings of chorus and spectators alike, its charming rhythmical surprises, its curious felicity and simple dignity, and above all its prevailing religious tone, now reminiscent of the Delphic Hymn to Apollo, now suggestive of a Church chorale, provided a new and vivid emotional experience. It proved, what many have always believed, that Greek music, like the other Greek arts, must have always been a thing of beauty, even judged by modern standards, and that the choral parts must always have been the chief feature of Greek tragedy. The chorus of Greek women, here increased to seventeen and relieved from the duty of singing, was certainly the chief actor, as always the chief element in the stage picture: the groupings and the movements and the softly-colored draperies were a constant pleasure to the eye, and the simple but stately dances wrought into visible harmony the words and the rhythms and the musical setting, a living exposition of the Greek genius for uniting all the arts in one supreme

sensuous and ethical appeal. The shape of the stage in the Hill Auditorium made an orchestra impossible: the altar (a genuine Roman *puteal*) was set to one side, and no attempt was made at strophic arrangement of dances. Nevertheless the chorus was more 'convincing' than that in the great open-air production of the Agamemnon at Harvard, and vastly more pleasing than that in Mr. Granville Barker's recent popular performances. This success was due largely, of course, to the fine music, but Professor Kenyon, who designed the dances and trained all the performers, is to be congratulated on his happy compromises between the ancient and the modern: some compromise has to be made, and it is far better to aim at the Greek spirit than at the archaeological letter. The concession, however, made to the modern theatre-goer of an interval before the last stasimon, with the chorus leaving the stage, though no curtain was lowered, seemed to be quite unnecessary.

The costumes, designed by Dr. Orma F. Butler, were all beautiful, and, though also something of a compromise, sufficiently true to what we know of antiquity, and were worn naturally as if they were actual clothes. Iphigenia, the Choregus, Orestes, Pylades, and the Messengers, in appearance, as well as in action, were very real persons, who would have satisfied the realistic spirit of Euripides. Even the Taurian barbarians were copied from Scythians as represented in the vase-paintings, and were far more effective than Mr. Barker's monsters; Thoas especially was a striking figure, not the burlesque that Mr. Barker made of him. And who that saw it will ever forget the splendid figure of Pallas Athena at the climax of the play, shown in a lightning-flash that gave unearthly glory to her white robes and shining helmet and aegis? We have been accustomed to think of the *deus ex machina* as a feeble Euripidean device for unraveling the plot, or rather for cutting its Gordian knot, and making an end of the play; but every experience with actual performances shows the effectiveness of such a climax, not only in a spectacular but also in a religious way. We no longer worship the Greek gods, nor perhaps did Euripides himself, but even a twentieth-century sceptic must have felt a thrill of almost pious awe at the resplendent apparition of the patron-saint of Athens, personifying all that Athens stood for in civilization and the arts, towering above the prostrate barbarians. At least we can guess what the Athenian spectator must have felt, and how the emotional and artistic effect of the drama culminated for him in its religious and patriotic appeal. It is true that the Greek theater had no such artifice as calcium light, but the southern sunlight must have served as well, and no machine was needed (though one was effectively employed in the Pennsylvania production) to present the sudden and startling apparition. As the Taurians cowered in the darkness of the coming storm, the goddess was flashed into view high on the right above a clump of shrubbery, a fitting symbol of the triumph of the Greek spirit over the powers of darkness

and barbaric force—a symbol that has not lost its significance even in these Greekless days!

HERBERT H. YEAMES.

CHRONOLOGY OF THE REIGNS OF THE CAESARS

Mommsen (*Staatsrecht*, II.2.802) states that dating events according to the year of an Emperor's reign was not recognized as the official method, even in the western part of the Empire. The old system of dating by consulships still continued to be practised officially.

When a year of an imperial reign does exceptionally appear, it is not probable that the computation is made from the day of an Emperor's accession, nor from the tenth of December, the day on which the tribunes assumed office, but rather from the beginning of the calendar year, January first. When that is done, it is still uncertain whether the partial year of the accession is omitted, or whether all of it is included.

In note 2 on the same page, after mentioning the passages of Dio, Suetonius, Philo and Tacitus bearing on the length of the reign of Tiberius, or giving a definite year in the reign, he says:

But one who computes in this way cannot possibly reckon the year 19. Aug. 14/15 as the first year of the reign of Tiberius.

And finally, in note 3, he cites Tacitus Ann. 4.1, and comments thus:

Here the Roman calendar year is meant, and it seems to be computed from Jan. 1, 15.

But an examination of the sources shows distinctly that the Roman historians regarded the actual day of accession as the beginning of an Emperor's reign, and computed the duration of the reign from that day. Nor is there any convincing evidence that any other system was used by them when the ordinal numeral appears denoting one of the intervening years of a reign. On the contrary, the sources show clearly that computations were not made from January first either preceding or following the accession. In fact, Tacitus is obviously referring to a general system when he says of the date of the accession of Vespasian (*Hist.* 2.79):

festinante Tiberio Alexandro, qui kalendis Iuliis sacramento eius legiones egit. Isque primus principatus dies in posterum celebratus, quamvis Iudaicus exercitus quinto nonas Iulias apud ipsum iurasset.

The evidence from inscriptions is very meager, and that from the papyri is limited to the usage in a small part of the Empire. So the historians are first taken as a basis, and the other sources are discussed separately after these.

Tiberius

Reigned from August 19, 14 to March 16, 37. Actual length of reign, 22 years, 6 months, 27 days.

Tacitus, Ann. 4.1: C. Asinio C. Antistio consulibus nonus Tiberio annus compositae rei publicae.

Suetonius, Tib. 73: obit in villa Lucullana octavo et septuagesimo aetatis anno, tertio et vicesimo imperii, XVII. Kal. Ap. Cn. Acerronio Proculo C. Pontio Nigr[in]jo cons.